



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

***Enhancing DHS' Efforts to Disrupt Alien Smuggling
Across Our Borders***

July 22, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing entitled *Enhancing DHS' Efforts to Disrupt Alien Smuggling Across Our Borders*:

"I want to thank Chairman Cuellar for holding today's hearing to examine the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to combat alien smuggling across America's borders.

I recently visited Arizona, where I heard from residents about the need to do more to secure our borders and fight human smuggling and drug trafficking.

I also received briefings from Border Patrol's Tucson Sector leadership and met with Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials in Phoenix about the serious challenges they are facing.

Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, a member of this Subcommittee, and I discussed with ICE's Special Agent in Charge in Phoenix the rising threat posed by smuggling organizations. Rep. Kirkpatrick has been a vocal advocate for combating smuggling and trafficking in her state.

She has also highlighted the very troubling effects these criminal organizations are having even in cities not located directly on the border, such as Phoenix.

I thank her for her leadership and look forward to continuing to work with her on these important issues.

I left Arizona with an even better appreciation for the magnitude of the concerns facing border residents and the challenges facing Federal and state law enforcement officials in the region.

In recognition of these challenges, Secretary Napolitano's recent announcement regarding sending additional CBP and ICE personnel and assets to Arizona is welcome news.

I look forward to hearing more today about how these resources will be utilized, how long they will be deployed, and what the long-term plan is for addressing border security needs in the area.

Regarding the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report being released today, it is apparent that much work remains to be done to address smuggling. I am especially concerned about GAO's finding that ICE is not making the best use of its personnel to investigate alien smuggling organizations.

According to GAO, ICE investigators are doing immigration enforcement work that would be better suited to detention officers, leaving investigators less time to conduct activities related to addressing criminal organizations.

Given our finite border security resources, it is imperative that ICE examine how it can better allocate its personnel to address this recommendation. I am also interested in hearing about whether additional resources or authorities are necessary for ICE to carry out their mission.

While DHS has made some progress on alien smuggling since GAO's last report on the topic in 2005, it is clear that much still remains to be done.

I hope GAO will be able to share with us the developments they have observed over the last five years, and that ICE and CBP will speak to the Department's plans going forward.

At the state level, Arizona has been particularly affected by alien smuggling organizations in recent years.

The Arizona Attorney General's office and its law enforcement partners have achieved impressive results combating alien smuggling organizations by going after their money.

Federal and state law enforcement agencies should be encouraged to work together to identify and implement measures to address alien smugglers. Hopefully today's hearing offers an opportunity to further that important effort."

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